How GRATITUDE Supports HEALTH

Research has found that gratitude is good for our bodies, our minds, and our relationships.

**SOCIAL**
- More forgiving
- More outgoing
- Feel less lonely and isolated
- More helpful, generous, and compassionate
- More willingly supported by others

**PHYSICAL**
- Stronger immune systems
- Less bothered by aches and pains
- Lower blood pressure
- Lower risk of heart attacks
- Take better care of their health
- Sleep longer and better

**PSYCHOLOGICAL**
- Higher levels of positive emotions
- More alert, alive, and awake
- More joy and pleasure
- More optimism and happiness
- More resilient to stress

Greater Good Science Center
DID YOU KNOW?

**KINDNESS IS TEACHABLE**

"It's kind of like weight training, we found that people can actually build up their compassion 'muscle' and respond to others' suffering with care and a desire to help."

Dr. Ritchie Davidson, University of Wisconsin

**KINDNESS IS CONTAGIOUS**

The positive effects of kindness are experienced in the brain of everyone who witnessed the act, improving their mood and making them significantly more likely to "pay it forward." This means one good deed in a crowded area can create a domino effect and improve the day of dozens of people!

**KINDNESS INCREASES:**

**THE LOVE HORMONE**

Witnessing acts of kindness produces oxytocin, occasionally referred to as the 'love hormone' which aids in lowering blood pressure and improving our overall heart-health. Oxytocin also increases our self-esteem and optimism, which is extra helpful when we're in anxious or shy in a social situation.

**ENERGY**

"About half of participants in one study reported that they feel stronger and more energetic after helping others; many also reported feeling calmer and less depressed, with increased feelings of self-worth."

Christine Carter, UC Berkeley, Greater Good Science Center

**HAPPINESS**

A 2010 Harvard Business School survey of happiness in 136 countries found that people who are altruistic—in this case, people who were generous financially, such as with charitable donations—were happiest overall.

**LIFESPAN**

"People who volunteer tend to experience fewer aches and pains. Giving help to others protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease. People 55 and older who volunteer for two or more organizations have an impressive 44% lower likelihood of dying early, and that's after sifting out every other contributing factor, including physical health, exercise, gender, habits like smoking, marital status and many more. This is a stronger effect than exercising four times a week or going to church." Christine Carter, Author, "Raising Happiness: In Pursuit of Joyful Kids and Happier Parents"

**PLEASURE**

According to research from Emory University, when you are kind to another person, your brain's pleasure and reward centers light up, as if you were the recipient of the good deed—not the giver. This phenomenon is called the "helper's high."

**SEROTONIN**

Like most medical antidepressants, kindness stimulates the production of serotonin. This feel-good chemical heals your wounds, calms you down, and makes you happy!

**KINDNESS DECREASES:**

**PAIN**

Engaging in acts of kindness produces endorphins, the brain's natural painkillers!

**STRESS**

Perpetually kind people have 23% less cortisol (the stress hormone) and age slower than the average population!

**ANXIETY**

A group of highly anxious individuals performed at least six acts of kindness a week. After one month, there was a significant increase in positive moods, relationship satisfaction and a decrease in social avoidance in socially anxious individuals.

University of British Columbia Study

**DEPRESSION**

Stephen Post of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine found that when we give of ourselves, everything from life satisfaction to self-realization and physical health is significantly improved. Mortality is delayed, depression is reduced and well-being and good fortune are increased.

**BLOOD PRESSURE**

Commits acts of kindness lowers blood pressure. According to Dr. David R. Hamilton, acts of kindness create emotional warmth, which releases a hormone known as oxytocin. Oxytocin causes the release of a chemical called nitric oxide, which dilates the blood vessels. This reduces blood pressure and, therefore, oxytocin is known as a "cardioprotective" hormone. It protects the heart by lowering blood pressure.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.RANDOMACTSOFKINDNESS.ORG
Phrases to Help With Difficult Conversations

We all inevitably need to have conversations with people that are difficult and can cause the person we are speaking with to get defensive. One way we can avoid them getting defense is to provide them with a way out of the conversation with dignity. Try these phrases the next time you find yourself in an awkward conversation. “You might not realize this but....” You probably didn’t realize this but....You might not know this but” or when you don’t want to come off as a ‘know it all’. “You might already be aware of this but”, or “You probably already know this but...”

Directions: Think of a real life conversation that you have had where one of these phrases might have made the conversation go more successfully and fill in the blanks.

1. You might not realize this but

2. You probably already know this but
Steps to start a gratitude journal

1. Choose a blank notebook or journal to write in. Consider a spiral-bound journal that opens flat for ease in writing. Select lined or unlined paper. Keep this notebook next to the bed with a pen readily available.

2. Look for things during the day for which you are grateful. Make mental notes throughout the day. Notice how the gratitude journal shifts the focus to a more positive outlook.

3. Write five things you’re grateful for before bedtime. Review the day and include anything, however small or great, that was a source of gratitude that day, e.g., a baby’s smile, a flower in bloom, or the smell of a newly cut grass. Make the list personal. Write a few words about the five benefits or blessings. Be brief and increase the length as time progresses.

4. Personalize the gratitude journal. Expand it with clippings, photos and quotes from magazines or other sources –

5. Remember the best practices for writing in a gratitude journal; be specific, choose something that has scarcity attached to it, pick something that surprised you or you weren’t expecting. Focus on near misses.

Best practices modified from *Gratitude Works! A 21 Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity* by Dr. Robert Emmons.
Directions For Writing a Gratitude Letter

Writing a Gratitude Letter to someone is a great way to show your appreciation for that person. You can write the letter to someone you talk to everyday or to someone you haven’t talked to in years. The important thing is that you have not taken the time to properly thank that person for the great things the person has done for you in your life. One caution when writing the gratitude letter; make sure it is someone who you feel positively about not someone in which you feel indebted. Use the space below to write the first draft of your letter. You will want to edit it several times to get the wording just right.
Instructions for making a Gratitude visit.

Select one important person from your past who has made a major positive difference in your life and to whom you have never fully expressed your thanks. (Do not confound this selection with new-found romantic love, or with the possibility of a future gain.) Write a testimonial just long enough to cover one laminated page. Take your time composing this; my students and I found ourselves taking several weeks, composing on buses and as we feel asleep at night. Invite that person to your home, or travel to that person’s home. It is important you do this face to face, not just in writing or on the phone. Do not tell the person the purpose of the visit in advance; a simple “I just want to see you” will suffice. Bring a laminated version of your testimonial with you as a gift. When all settles down, read your testimonial aloud slowly, with expression, and with eye contact. Then let the other person react unhurriedly. Reminisce together about the concrete events that make this person so important to you. (If you are so moved, please do send me a copy at Seligman@psych.upenn.edu)